DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 326 748 CE 056 856

TITLE Commission Work Programme Relating to the Promotion of Innovation in Secondary Education in the European Community.

INSTITUTION Commission of the European Communities, Brussels (Belgium).

PUB DATE 14 Oct 88

NOTE 17p.

PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.

DESCRIPTORS Career Education; *Change Strategies; *Educational Change; *Educational Cooperation; *Educational Innovation; Education Work Relationship; Foreign Countries; *International Cooperation; International Educational Exchange; International Programs; Secondary Education

IDENTIFIERS *European Community

ABSTRACT

The Commission of the European Communities (CEC) has proposed a program for practical cooperation among Member States in secondary education. The strategies and methods of cooperation developed in two previous action programs must be adapted to the evolving situation of the 1990s. Factors of particular importance are continuing structural change in the labor market, a steady drop in the number of young people entering the labor market, and the need for a system for the management of change. Further preparatory and analytical work has been carried out in two important thematic areas: inservice training at the "grass-roots" level and illiteracy prevention. These priorities have been identified from the following needs: (1) to prepare teachers better for their new roles in the transition process; (2) to promote closer links between education and economic development; (3) to combat school failure; (4) to strengthen the specific role of the school in the guidance process; (5) to promote gender equality in education; and (6) to strengthen partnership between parents and secondary schools. The CEC intends to monitor innovation in secondary education, identify opportunities for cooperation, and establish a task force that will provide technical assistance. (YLB)

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ED326748

COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

COM(88) 545 final

Brussels, 14 October 1988

COMMISSION WORK PROGRAMME

relating to the promotion of innovation in secondary education in the European Community

(Communication from the Commission)

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I. Introduction

1. In their Conclusions on the outcomes of the second Action Programme[1], adopted at their meeting in May 1988, the Council and Ministers of Education invited the Commission to bring forward, as soon as possible, proposals for a further stage of practical cooperation at Community level. This cooperation should in particular assist Member States in strengthening their capacity for innovation in secondary education, with a special focus on a number of priority themes emerging from the previous Programme and linking with other related Community action in the fields of teacher training, measures to prevent school failure and illiteracy, and action to ensure equality of opportunity for girls in secondary education.

2. The Council also took note of the Commission's communication[2] on medium-term perspectives for cooperation at Community level in education up to 1992, identifying in particular the ways in which education systems should contribute to the creation of the Internal Market and its exploitation; to the closer integration associated with the emergence of the European Market; and to the need to reduce regional disparities and to promote the social cohesion of the Community. In that perspective, the Commission proposed that the programme to build on the successes of the second Transition Action Programme should also provide a framework for

- dialogue and reflection between national education authorities about future directions in secondary education in the 1990s;

- action to improve the capacity of education and training to respond to the needs of areas and/or regions with particular needs, e.g. rural areas in danger of depopulation, or undergoing economic diversification away from dependence on agriculture;

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1) European Community's second Action Programme for the Transition of young people from education to adult and working life.

2) "Education in the European Community Medium-term perspectives: 1989-1992. (COM(88) 280 final of 18 May 1988).

- the need to support developments aimed at inter-cultural cooperation in areas with ethnically-mixed populations;

- the future development, and dissemination of approaches, already validated in part in the second Action Programme, in favour of disadvantaged young people.

II. New perspectives

3. The strategies and methods of cooperation developed in the two previous Action Programmes now need to be adapted to the evolving situation of the 1990s. In this context the following appear to be of particular importance.

4. Continuing structural change in the labour market, the wider and further diversified use of new technologies, and new forms of employment and career patterns - all these are making new demands on the competences and skills of young people, and on the character and quality of compulsory education. Schools need to play a stronger role in local and regional development, and to strengthen and expand the range of their links with the economic world, in order to provide better and fairer opportunities for all young people, especially those who are personally disadvantaged or live in disadvantaged areas.

5. Many countries are now starting to experience a steady fall in the number of young people entering the labour market, following on the demographic "bulge" which contributed to the high levels of youth unemployment in the 1980s. This raises new problems of how to increase diversification in education provision, and improve its quality, in a period of sharply falling enrolments in compulsory secondary education, and how to ensure that young people are motivated to enter, and remain in, vocational training at a time when the labour market is moving strongly in their favour.

6. New policy initiatives or reforms in secondary education, some of them large-scale, are being prepared or implemented in a number of Member States, to face the challenges of the 1990s. It is essential for the further integration of the European Community that these reforms are not undertaken in isolation from developments in other parts of the Community. European cooperation and exchange of experience need to be further intensified between the Member States in order to enhance mutual awareness of the impact which their new policies can have on the Community and the future of its young people, and to contribute to the formulation of a common, European, frame for the evolution of national policies.

7. The adaptation of education provision to the rapidly evolving social and economic context, and to individual needs, is slowed down in many countries by the systems' lack of capacity to manage and monitor innovation and change. The management, financing and monitoring of innovation in the school systems must be given a higher political priority. Conditions for change, and perhaps new rewards, need to be developed to encourage individual schools and teachers to engage in innovation and to learn how to manage it. One important way of achieving this is to ensure more autonomy and flexibility to enable schools to respond to changing needs. The training and sensitisation of teachers and school-heads is a crucial factor in enabling and motivating them to take such initiative and to support innovative work. It is equally important to strengthen the role of inspectors, advisers and other services in stimulating and supporting these processes in the schools. More effective use should be made of pilot projects or innovation areas as part of large-scale policy development and implementation.

8. Strengthening the capacity of teachers, schools and education systems to adapt to the new challenges of the 1990s should therefore be seen as a high priority. It occupies a central place in the strategy outlined below for Community action, in support of Member States' own efforts in this area.

III. Other Community-level developments

9. Following the conclusions of the Council of Education Ministers in 1987, further preparatory and analytical work has been carried out at Community level in two important thematic areas

- on the basis of the analytical survey of in-service training policies and systems of provision in Member States carried out by the Commission in 1986, a series of national case-studies have been commissioned to provide up-to-date illustrations of the way these systems work in practice at "grass-roots" level; and disussions have been held with national-level authorities on the latest developments in their policies. This stage of work will be completed in late 1988 with a seminar in Greece to review results;

- a series of action research studies are to be launched in September 1988 on different types of action aimed at the prevention of illiteracy, ranging from primary to adult education. The outcomes will be available, during 1989, in time for them to be taken into account in the following stage of work.

10. In 1986, the Commission published a major report on the state of educational and vocational guidance services in the European Community, designed to identify how it could best support the future development of such services, especially those for the 14-25 age-group. The study focussed particularly on the changing role of the different professional guidance services, and the linkages between them. The study's conclusions on the role of schools and the need for more effective follow-up of young school-leavers were closely in line with the conclusions reached in the Transition Action Programme.

11. The Commission's Special Action Programme, following up the Council Resolution of Equal Opportunties for Girls and Boys in Education of 3 June 1985, is also relevant here. Complementing the two reports on gender equality strategies published as part of the Transition Action Programmes, the Commission has

- published an Action Handbook on how to implement gender equality, and distributed it to all national Ministries of Education, for circulation to teachers, parents and administrators;

- sponsored an action-research to study the influence which equal access in school to technical subjects and the relevant new technology equipment would have on girls' future career choices;

- sponsored studies on the role of informal out-of-school initiatives; on the equal opportunities dimension of the teaching of girls from migrant workers' families; and on the extent of womens' studies in post-compulsory education;

- sponsored seminars with the European Teachers' Union and with the European Parents' Association; and

- initiated an action-research to facilitate the inclusion of equal opportunities material in teacher-training courses, both initial and in-service.

12. Finally, it should also be noted that in December 1987, the Council of Social Affairs Ministers approved a Decision to support and supplement the activities of Member States designed to ensure that all young people have access to one, two or more years of vocational training after the end of their full-time compulsory education. The Action Programme now being set up under the Decision will provide opportunities at Community level to follow up a number of key conclusions from the Transition Action Programme, in particular, the need to strengthen continuity of planning and provision between compulsory general education and vocational education and training.

IV. Priorities

13. The priority issues which can be identified from these factors can be summarised as follows :

a) The need to prepare teachers and other staff better for their new roles in the transition process.

Teachers play the key role for change in the schools, and in-service training and staff development provide the key to prepare them for this role. But most of the in-service training offered to teachers is still subject-based, rather than geared towards improving the capacities, both of individuals and institutes, to manage innovation and to fulfil new functions. In many systems, participation in formal in-service training is optional for the teachers and mostly provided for by training establishments outside the individual school. Future Community action in this field should therefore stimulate and reinforce approaches which :

- take the needs and objectives for development of the individual schools as a starting point for in-service training, using the schools themselves as the basis for it and involving, if possible, the whole of the individual school's staff;

- encourage schools to identify, through self-analysis or self-review, their own staff training needs, and give them responsibility for developing their own school-based training programmes, drawing on the training potential of innovative action;

- promote cooperation and contact between different types of schools from both general and vocational education, as part of their training and staff development policies;

- enhance the more systematic use of training resources which can be opened up through cooperation between the schools and their social and economic environment, such as work experience for teachers, exploratory visits and short secondments to industry;

- stimulate new forms of cooperation and co-ordination between teachers within individual schools, in order to achieve greater flexibility in the implementation of the curriculum and to exploit the full scope for innovative action;

- create or mobilise local, regional or national resources to support the actions above.

b) The need to promote closer links between education and economic development.

School-industry links are unevenly developed in the various sectors of the education system. They are more widely established in prevocational and vocational education and in the lower-prestige streams of general education. More effort should be directed towards exploiting the benefits to be derived from such cooperation in all types of secondary education and for young people with all kinds of ability. More emphasis should also be placed on strengthening the schools' capacity not only to respond to economic and labour market change, but also to play a more stimulating role in local and regional economic development, particularly in disadvantaged areas. The new Action Programme should therefore assist further initiatives which :

- explore and develop further, in secondary schools, the concept of enterprise education, in order to improve young people's understanding of the potential for development in their area, and to enhance their creativity, sense of initiative and entrepreneurial skills;

- encourage all types of schools in secondary education to draw on the full range of opportunities and methods for cooperation with industry, including contact with both employers and trade unions;

- involve cooperative projects and activities, together with firms, which enhance young people's understanding of the new technologies and their capacity to make practical use of them; this applies especially to girls and young women;

- provide special in-service training for teachers, to improve their knowledge of local/regional prospects for development, and enabling them to organise effective contact and cooperation with firms;

- emphasise the need for attitude change in both industry as well as schools, so as to stimulate and encourage firms to offer resources and other types of support to schools in their areas;

- develop the necessary local/regional structures or mechanisms to facilitate cooperation between schools and industry.

c) The need to combat school failure.

It is of crucial importance, in both economic and social terms, to reduce dramatically the number of those entering the labour market without appropriate qualifications. Throughout the Community, the numbers of jobs available for those without a vocational qualification will fall continuously and sharply until the end of this century. Success in secondary education provides the key for access to vocational training. Large numbers of young people, however, still leave full-time compulsory education without any formal qualification. With variations between the different Member States, they represent between 15 and 20% of school-leavers in the best cases and reach much higher proportions in others.

Future Community efforts in this field should therefore encourage the wider use of new approaches to meeting the needs of the lower-achieving or otherwise disadvantaged young people in secondary education such as those developed in the Transition Programme. In this, particular attention should be given to :

- reviewing present curriculum arrangements and the style of teaching and learning, to improve their suitability for the weakest pupils;

- exploring the more systematic use of learning situations outside the school in order to increase the pupils' personal competences and motivation;

- developing further methods of assessment and appropriate certification in order to give recognition to the full range of abilities and the different kinds of achievement of all young people.

d) The need to strengthen the specific role of the school in the guidance process.

In addition to their function in the field of educational guidance, schools are also playing a more and more central role in the process of vocational guidance and vocational choice. This process has to start in the early years of secondary education, and a tendency can be seen for the specialised guidance services to redefine their tasks in terms of a subsidiary role, leaving the first-in-line guidance function to the schools. There is also a trend towards requiring schools to play a larger part in continuing guidance contact with those of their students who leave school at the end of the compulsory stage and may then drop out of formal education and training.

Future Community action should therefore assist Member States' policies in helping schools :

- to integrate the guidance process into their curriculum;

- to find the most effective ways for coordinating their work, with that of the various specialised agencies;

- to draw on the wider range of formal or informal services for guidance, which can be tapped inside and outside the education system;

- to develop practicable procedures for follow-up guidance and contact with school-leavers who are in danger of dropping out of formal education and training.

e) The need to promote gender equality in education

In legal terms, equality of opportunity for girls and boys has been largely achieved in the education systems of the Community. In practice, however, sex-biased behaviour and traditional role stereotypes are still a widespread reality in the education process, restricting the vocational choices and affecting the life chances of many girls in a decisive way. Future Community action in this field should therefore support and stimulate further initiatives within and by Member States :

- to raise awareness amongst teachers, curriculum developers and guidance specialists, that continous positive action and self-review is needed to counteract gender bias in teaching and learning, and to widen the range of educational and vocational choices made by girls;

- to encourage coordination, especially at the local level, of activities in the school sector and initiatives in other public sectors and/or by private bodies, which tackle issues of gender equality;

- to evaluate the effectiveness of local, regional and national strategies which are aimed at implementing equality of opportunity through positive action in education.

f) The need to strengthen partnership between parents and secondary schools.

Greater recognition is now being given in school systems to the role of parents in support of their own children's education in secondary school, as well as in other ways, e.g. in school management, and as resource-persons to assist school-industry linking. Some examples of new ways for schools and education authorities to stimulate and facilitate parental involvement in secondary education were reported in the Transition Programme. Nonetheless, this is an area in which further development work should be undertaken, in view of the important potential contribution of parents' support to raising motivation and achievement, especially, but not exclusively, among young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. Support should therefore be offered to further experimenal work in this area, in the context of related development work to tackle school-failure, to develop school-economy links, to improve guidance processes and equality of opportunity, and to assist teachers adjust to new tasks and roles.

V. Proposals for future action at Community leve.

14. In order to assist and strengthen cooperation at Community level, in the above identified priority areas for further development, the Commission will intensify its efforts to maintain a process of continuous dialogue with Member States on innovation in secondary education.

15. In practical terms the Commission will arrange for a series of regular and well-prepared seminars or round-table discussions with those responsible in the Member States for planning and monitoring innovation in the various thematic priority fields. This will enable identification of opportunities for cooperation at Community level at an early stage, help to review points of convergence and possible divergence between the Member States, and assist the transfer of experience throughout the Community. It will also be designed to illuminate national policy development in the light of a shared awareness of European experiences which is so generally lacking at present.

16. To underpin this dialogue and process of cooperation the Commission envisages practical support in two ways :

a) the establishment of a small European task-force to prepare, on a continuing basis, a consolidated contribution to the process of dialogue and discussion with Member States' authorities, monitoring the main policy trends and initiatives in the fields in question. The task-force will act as a "clearing house" to follow up the development of relevant on-going Community initiatives (such as the Action Research Programme on illiteracy and the Special Action Programme on gender equality in secondary education) and provide a coherent analysis of their contribution to innovation and cooperation with regard to the specific priority fields described in Section IV. The task-force will also assist in facilitating the use of existing Community exchange schemes, for instance the ARION study-visit programme for local and regional administrators, to encourage interaction and cooperation in these fields between practitioners. Finally, it will maintain close information links with relevant innovatory action in the Member States in areas to provide continuously up-dated documentation for use at Community level, drawing appropriately on the Eurydice system.

b) the provision of technical assistance by the European task-force, on behalf of the Commission, to assist Member States in stimulating the dissemination of innovation in the priority fields set out in Section IV, and in giving a European dimension to this process. This will include limited support to individual Member States for the identification and formation of a number of geographically coherent "innovation areas" in each Member State, which would play a lead role, linked with national policy review arrangements, in implementing and demonstrating innovation in one or more of the agreed priority fields.

In each area a sufficient number of schools should be involved in order to make a visible impact on the local or regional provision. In each area, one or more teacher training establishments should be actively associated with the innovatory work in the schools, so as to ensure continuity and multiplication of innovative approaches through in-service and initial teacher training. The Commission's support will be available as a contribution to initiate self-review and development projects in the participating schools, and related teacher training programmes, which demonstrate how educational establishments can make creative use of their flexibility and autonomy within the existing systems. Special attention would be paid it enabling the innovation areas to draw on successful approaches developed in other parts of the Community. The Commission's task-force (see a) above) will provide advice and relevant documentation to assist the setting up and networking of the innovation areas.

This work programme will be implemented by the Commission in cooperation with Member States in the three-year period from 1989 to 1992. The Education Committee will thus be able to ensure the full exploitation of the results of previous work and the dissemination of good practices in the different Member States.

- Fiche financière

1. Le programme de travail qui fait l'objet du présent Projet de Communication touche à un certain nombre de domaines - comme la Formation des Enseignants, la Lutte contre l'échec scolaire, l'Illetrisme, les Relations Ecole-Parents et la Formation Professionnelle des jeunes - dans lesquels l'intervention communautaire se traduit par des actions de type annuel, financées à partir des postes budgétaires B 6300 - Actions en matières d'éducation et B 6340 - Actions en matière de formation et d'orientation professionnelles.

2. Les propositions d'action envisagées par le présent programme de travail n'impliquent pas de charge budgétaire supplémentaire par rapport à l'évolution prévue des dotations des postes B 6300 et B 6340 (1), lesquelles recouvrent déjà en 1988 (et recouvraient dans les exercices antérieurs) des actions de type annuel ayant trait aux domaines précités.

(1) à savoir une progression limitée au Taux Maximum d'Augmentation (annuel) des Dépenses Non-Obligatoires.